

The Development of a Japanese Proficiency Test
for Pre-College Students: An Evaluation of the Grammar Items

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PURPOSE and BACKGROUND

There is a growing need that a standard Japanese proficiency test for pre-college students (JPT) should be produced. A major role of JPT is to provide information to officials of the Japanese government and universities in making decisions regarding the admission of foreign students to Japanese universities. Therefore, the aim of JPT is to assess the foreign student's competence in Japanese required for successful studies at colleges or universities where Japanese is a medium of instruction. However, the nature and validity of JPT have been rarely discussed by teachers and test constructors.

The overall goal of this research is to obtain useful information for developing a Japanese proficiency test for pre-college students. In order to obtain such information, one of the existing tests conducted at the end of preparatory education was analyzed. The test is made up of the following six sections: 1. Japanese Grammar (20 items); 2. Reading Comprehension (21 items); 3. Listening Comprehension (25 items); 4. Kanji Reading (40 items); 5. Kanji Writing (40 items); and 6. Vocabulary (20 items). The test is mainly an objective measure using a multiple-choice format, although two sections, Kanji Reading and Kanji Writing, are a subjective measure using a writing format.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate content specifications of the grammar section and to illustrate the difficulties and effectiveness of the test items of the grammar section at two different groups.

METHODS

A total of 166 non-native pre-college students from two different types of Japanese language programs took the test: 125 students of a preparatory school located outside of Japan (ABROAD) and 41 students of the Japanese Language Center for International Students of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in Japan (JAPAN).

The grammar section consists of two parts, with 10 items for each.

In part I, each item consists of a statement with one deleted word or short phrase, and the examinee must choose the missing word or phrase from four alternatives. In part II, a statement of each item has one word or phrase underlined. The examinee must choose the option that will best replace the underlined part of the statement, so that the basic meaning of the statement remains the same.

RESULTS and CONCLUSIONS

The results of the grammar test scores of the three groups are shown below.

Japanese Grammar:	Multiple-choice measure Items 20		
	MIX (ABROAD+JAPAN)	ABROAD	JAPAN
No. of subjects	166	125	41
Mean	9.46	9.30	9.93
Standard Deviation	2.59	2.51	3.21
Maximum Score	16.00	14.00	16.00
Minimum Score	3.00	3.00	4.00
Reliability	.44	.44	.58

Item analyses (item difficulty and item discrimination) were conducted for all items of the grammar test. The result showed that the patterns of performance on the 20 grammar items were different between the two groups. In order to investigate the reason for the difference of performance, each item was analyzed by checking with the Standards of Levels for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test and the textbooks of the two groups. It is found that the level of the test is generally at the second level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test but the item difficulty and discrimination tend to vary whether the examinee has studied or faced the item before.

The study also shows that if the alternatives of multiple-choice are not studied before, the examinee tends to choose either familiar alternatives or choose them at random. Therefore, it is suggested that alternatives should be taken from words or phrases which are already studied by the examinees. It is also recommended that questions be presented in contextualized settings for pre-college students. Use of such contextualized multiple-choice items may be preferable in order to measure more accurately the examinee's language proficiency required at university level.